
COLONIZATION AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF AUSTRALIA, AOTEAROA, AND RAPA NUI

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Comparative analysis exposes the shared experiences of colonized peoples throughout the world, and clearly illuminates colonization as “a global project with underlying principles that become apparent when seen on a broader canvas” (Byrnes & Ritter 2008:55; Durie 2004). The indigenous peoples of Australia, Aotearoa, and Rapa Nui occupy vastly different geographical regions, but share many interwoven commonalities in their histories and experiences of colonization. The most prevalent of these relates to the process of colonization, and the perceptions and attitudes of the colonizer toward indigenous peoples which have greatly influenced government policies in the past, and continue to contribute to the disadvantages indigenous peoples face in socio-economic status and health conditions (Anderson 2007; Durie 2004; Smith 1999; Hito 2004). One of the key differences between Australia, Aotearoa, and Rapa Nui is that the former nation never sought treaties with its indigenous peoples, and this is reflected in the socio-economic status and health indicators of indigenous Australia (Huggins 2008; Behrendt 2004; Havnen 2004). In making a comparative analysis of three different indigenous populations, it is important to contrast the respective current socio-economic factors and health conditions, by first providing an historical context. This will be achieved by critiquing the histories and processes of settlement, and highlighting indigenous responses to colonisation in Australia, Aotearoa, and Rapa Nui.

It is widely understood that settler societies “share common structural features because of dominance imposed on Indigenous peoples” (Maaka & Fleras 2005:18). The initial stages of colonization were underpinned by the notion that Europeans “had a God-given right and duty to govern the worlds ‘lesser’ people” (Hollinsworth 2006:68). Perceptions of indigenous peoples were predicated on scientific theories of evolution which rendered indigenous peoples inferior to Europeans (Brantlinger 2003). Such beliefs enabled the justification of the expropriation of other peoples’ land and resources (Hollinsworth 2006).

Throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, Europeans ventured into “new worlds” where they hoped to find opportunities for the creation of vast empires (Forrest 1995). The “Age of Discovery”, as it would soon be known, saw Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French exploratory voyages of the Pacific Ocean (Forrest 1995). Crozier (1999) argues that a “civilizational schema of successive stages of social development ... had served as the conceptual pretext for European colonization” (Crozier 1999:851). Analyses of European pre-colonial exploratory expeditions of the Pacific expose civilizational schemas as the fundamental motivations behind the colonial process in Australia, Aotearoa, and Rapa Nui.

On his voyage of the *Endeavour* in 1770, Lieutenant

James Cook was commissioned by the Royal Society to search for the mythic *Terra Australis* or the “land of great extent” (Knight 1968:25). Cook briefly encountered the Maori peoples of New Zealand (Aotearoa), who had been previously “discovered” by Abel Tasman, a Dutch explorer who soon fled the area after an encounter with a Maori war canoe in 1642 (Knight 1968). In observing the Maori peoples Cook noted the ingenuity in the construction of vessels and shelter, observed aspects of Maori culture and society, and remarked on religion and knowledge systems (Knight 1968). Cook soon departed Aotearoa for Australia, sparing the land of his possession, merely commenting on the prospective establishment of a colony, and continued eastward where his real interests lay.

Upon reaching the “land of great extent”, Cook was instructed to explore the coastline, carefully observing the true situation (Knight 1968). In the case that the land was inhabited, Cook was to “Consent with the Natives” (Secret Instructions for Lieutenant James Cook cited in NLA 2008), perhaps in the form of a treaty, to take possession of the land in the name of the King. If it were uninhabited, he was to “take Possession for his Majesty ... as first discoverers and possessors” (Secret Instructions for Lieutenant James Cook cited in NLA 2008). Cook and his crew vaguely scoured the east coast, blindfolded by images of opportunity, settlement, and civilization — choosing to be ignorant of the Aboriginal civilizations before them. In his descriptions he commented: “Neither are they very numerous.... They seem to have no fix’d habitation but move about from place to place like wild Beasts in search of food” (Cook cited in NLA 2004). Cook’s simplistic perceptions of Aboriginal peoples led him to the conclusion that the land was virtually uninhabited or *terra nullius* (“land belonging to no one”) and he claimed New South Wales in the name of the King.

In 1774, on his second voyage of the Pacific, Cook sailed the *Resolution* into the waters of Rapa Nui, a small triangular-shaped island 3,700 km (2,300 mi.) from mainland Chile and 6,000 km (3,728 mi.) from Aotearoa (McLaughlin 2007; Hito 2004). Briefly stopping over on the island for two days, Cook documented his observations of the Rapanui people (Van Tilburg 1995). In a similar vein to his surveillances of Aboriginal Australians, Cook’s perceptions of Rapanui peoples were simplistic and naïve. Commenting on the *moai* statues Cook remarked, “It was incomprehensible to me how such great masses could be formed by a setoff people among whom we saw no tools. We could hardly conceive how these islanders, wholly unacquainted with any mechanical powers, could raise such stupendous figures” (Cook cited in Mann 1976, p.33). His predetermined notions equated his negative representations of Aboriginal Australians, however his perceptions of land and civilisation intentions were different:

"No nation need contend for the honour of the discovery of this island.... Nature has been exceedingly sparing of her favours to this spot" (Cook cited in Mann 1976, p.34). Cook soon departed, where, upon his return to England, his reports of the "Antipodes" would dispel the myth of *Terra Australis*.

In the years following his voyages of the Pacific Ocean, Cook's visions of civilization for the "land of great extent" would become a reality (Crozier 1999; Knight 1968). In January of 1788, eleven shiploads of convicts arrived in Port Jackson, led by Governor Arthur Phillip — an event that would change the lives of the indigenous people forever (Green 2006). Australia was to become an offshore detention center for Britain's overcrowded penitentiaries. The convict system would form the basis of a new British colony, disregarding the indigenous peoples and dispossessing them of their lands. This initial stage of colonisation was detrimental to indigenous peoples in Australia. Disease, warfare, and policies of protection and assimilation dislocated communities throughout the land — a colonial legacy endured by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today (Hocking 2005).

Aotearoa's initial experience of colonisation differs significantly from Australia's, because it was founded upon a treaty. Although Maori peoples share many structural disadvantages that stem from the actions of Europeans in establishing settlement, a treaty was signed which offered at least "some recognition of the political reality of the Maori people" (Hocking 2005:xvi; Maaka & Fleras 2005). The absence of a treaty in Australia accompanied the motives of the British to settle the "unknown southern land" — a decision that was essentially already established as Cook sailed the Pacific Ocean.

The question of whether or not to colonize Aotearoa was still being explored fifty years after the colony of New South Wales was established. The Queen of England was to annex New Zealand in 1840 in response to the appearance of uncontrolled lawless communities, established by escaped convicts and stray settlers throughout Aotearoa. The Treaty of Waitangi was signed by the Crown and several Maori chiefs on February 6, 1840 (Walker 1989). However, defective translation meant that Maori chiefs were misled as to the terms of sovereignty; "the British saw this as a treaty of cession, Maori signatories considered it a confirmation of their sovereignty, in exchange for British protection" (Byrnes & Ritter 2008:57). Land rights became subject to the Maori-Pakeha Wars of the 1860s, which subsequently resulted in the seizure of three million acres of land, dispossessing Maori peoples of the most fundamental element of their society (Armitage 1995). This still remains a factor of tension between Maori and Pakeha (non-Maori) today.

Rapanui peoples suffered a colonial fate similar to that of the Maori peoples of Aotearoa. Following the Peruvian slave trades of 1862, the exploitation of Rapanui peoples with the establishment of a sheep ranch in the 1860s, and the popularized idea that the Rapanui had devastated the island's natural resources, Chile decided to annex the island based on the idea that they were rescuing "the diminished population from its own demise" (Hito 2004:22; McCall 2000). However,

underlying motives suggest that annexation of the island would ascertain a province extending "the borders of Chile far into the Pacific Ocean [establishing] Chile as an international player" (Hito 2004:22). The island was annexed by Chile in 1888 with the signing of the alleged Treaty of Cessation and Proclamation (Hito 2004).

Similar to the Treaty of Waitangi in Aotearoa, the intentions of Chilean Naval officers and Rapanui signatories of the Treaty and Proclamation were mistranslated (Hito 2004). The Chilean Naval officers intended "total cessation of the island", whereas Rapanui Chiefs, having no translation of the term *cessation*, were merely "welcoming the Chileans to use their motherland as friends" (Hito 2004:32). A direct line can be drawn between the Treaty and Proclamation and Chile-Rapanui relations today. Santi Hito (2004), who closely examined the conflicting translations of the Treaty, argues that "issues with regard to land rights and self-determination are direct descendants of misunderstandings created by the mistranslations and differing intentions of the makers and sponsors of the 'Treaty and Proclamation' in 1888" (Hito 2004:32).

Comparative Table 1 demonstrates some of the differences and similarities among Aboriginal, Maori, and Rapanui experiences of European contact and colonization.

Echoing the deceptive way in which treaties were managed, throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, policies pertaining to indigenous peoples in Australia, Aotearoa, and Rapa Nui were developed upon dominant racial ideologies that posited Europeans as a superior race (Brantlinger 2003; Armitage 1995). Such theories supported the notion that indigenous peoples were dying out, and it was assumed that they could eventually be eliminated from society (Brantlinger 2003). On the contrary, the increase of the Aboriginal population in Australia in the 1880s and the appearance of the "half-caste", posed a considerable threat to the British (Sissons 2005).

During this period, definitions of Aboriginality were developed on the basis of mathematical formulae and identity became explained by simple fractions and sums. The filtering process began with whole Aboriginality ("full blood") to half ("half-caste"), then followed the quarter ("quadroon") to the eighth ("octroon") — who by this stage had achieved full absorption into White society (Sissons 2005:45). British identity was to be protected, and the Aboriginal stain removed. Policies of child removal accompanied the assimilation of "half-caste" children for whom it was thought that they would eventually disappear into White society (Kenny 2007). Today, many Aboriginal peoples carry the burden of such policies when their identity is questioned and interrogated by those who determine Aboriginality based on the color of skin.

Bronwyn Fredericks (2004) discusses this legacy of colonization in relation to the interrogation of her Aboriginality:

What if we don't depict the cultural and social stereotypes of what some people in society believe, perceive or expect of us? What if we aren't dark brown or black skinned? I have experienced people trying to categorise me by my hair, skin or eye colour, in an attempt to organise me into a grouping that suits their

framework of what they perceive to be an Aboriginal woman.... Aboriginal people have had to work hard to build and sustain positive Aboriginal identities due to the influence of the dominant culture on their lives. (Fredericks 2004, p.30)

Although paternalistic policies were not as harshly enforced in Aotearoa, the arrival of settlers in 1840 and an increase in Pakeha population led to the deterioration of Maori social structure and organization (Fleras 1987). In comparison to Australia, similar policies of assimilation were adopted which aimed to undermine and subvert Maori culture (Maxwell 1999). An example of such policies is the Native Schools Act (1858 and 1867) which aimed to subvert Maori culture (Armitage 1995; Fleras 1987). However, by the 1920s, Maori peoples were becoming increasingly politically established in New Zealand society and “appeared to be accepting European values” (Armitage 1995:190). Armitage (1995) argues that this

is the main reason that Maori peoples were not as harshly subject to such culturally dislocating policies in comparison to Aboriginal peoples in Australia.

Policies of assimilation were also popular amongst other colonizing powers. Arrival of Spanish Conquistadores in the Americas significantly altered the lives of indigenous peoples (Aylwin 2006). Guided by the same racial ideologies as British colonizers in Australia and Aotearoa, the Spanish were to “impose their own laws and beliefs on the native, [taking] possession of their lands and wealth, severely affecting their physical existence” (Aylwin 2006:4). Since the annexation of Rapa Nui in 1888, Chilean laws and policies have promoted “Chileanization” (assimilation), “demonstrating little respect for [Indigenous] cultures and identity” (Aylwin 2006:6).

The examples presented in Comparative Table 2 demonstrate the similarities between events and government policies that were imposed upon indigenous peoples in Australia, Aotearoa, and Rapa Nui.

Comparative Table 1. Examples of European Contact and Colonization.

<i>location</i>	<i>event(s)</i>	<i>consequences</i>
Australia	1664 - Dutch explorers.	Dutch seafarer Abel Tasman chartered and explored the region, naming the land <i>Nova Hollandia</i> (New Holland).
	1770 - Captain James Cook; first voyage (1768-71).	Cook disregarded indigenous peoples, taking possession of the land.
	1788 - arrival of the First Fleet, establishment of penal colony.	Indigenous peoples disregarded, resulting in decimation of population through introduced disease, massacre, and government policies.
	Post-invasion rights of Aboriginal peoples.	From the moment of British invasion, Aboriginal people were denied any form of equal civil rights.
Aotearoa	1664 - Dutch explorers.	Dutch seafarer Abel Tasman later explored the region of Aotearoa, naming it <i>Staten Landt</i> after Staten Island, Argentina.
	1770 - Captain James Cook; first voyage (1768-71).	Cook recognized indigenous peoples, documenting Maori society, culture, and resources.
	1840 - Treaty of Waitangi.	Treaty of Waitangi recognized Maori peoples as legitimately occupying land before British colonization.
	Post-settlement rights of Maori peoples.	Maori peoples given same legal rights as Pakeha, but prevented from obtaining equal wealth or power (Maxwell 1999).
Rapa Nui	1722 - Dutch explorers.	Dutch Captain Jacob Roggeveen claimed island on Easter Sunday, naming it “Easter Island” (McCall 2000).
	1774 - Captain James Cook; second voyage (1772-75).	Cook recognized indigenous peoples, but disregarded ingenuity and resourcefulness.
	1888 - “Treaty and Proclamation”.	“Treaty and Proclamation” meant Rapanui were recognized as legitimately occupying land before Chilean colonization.
	Post-settlement rights of Rapanui peoples.	Rapanui received limited civil rights under control of the Easter Island Exploitation Company (Assies 2005).

Comparative Table 2. Examples of Government Policies.

<i>location</i>	<i>event(s)</i>	<i>consequences</i>
Australia	1837 - House of Commons Select Committee appointment of "Protectors of Aborigines".	"Protectors" gained control over the lives of Aboriginal peoples, disrupting their social structure (Armitage 1995).
	1869 - Aborigines Protection Act (VIC).	The Aborigines Protection Act established the Aborigines Protection Board which gained the power to remove any Aboriginal child from a family, further dislocating Aboriginal society (Kenny 2007).
	1880 - Public Instruction Act (NSW).	Enforced compulsory education for <i>all</i> children. Aimed to de-culturalize and civilize Aboriginal children (Parbury 1999).
Aotearoa	1840s - Mistranslation of Treaty and rapid increase in Pakeha population.	Maori sovereignty wrongfully ceded to Britain, resulting in deterioration of Maori <i>mana</i> ("power") and the Maori-Pakeha Wars (Fleras 1987:4).
	The Native Lands Act (1865, 1871).	Pakeha systems of land division and law furthered the alienation and dislocation of many Maori tribes (Fleras 1987).
	1867 - Native Schools Act.	Introduced compulsory education to "undermine the cultural basis of Maori society" (Armitage 1995; Fleras 1987).
Rapa Nui	1880s - Mistranslation of "Treaty and Proclamation".	Rapanui sovereignty was wrongfully ceded to Chile, establishing the negative tone of Chile-Rapanui relations.
	1895-1953 - Easter Island Exploitation Company (EIEC).	Rapanui were confined to a small section of the island where they were forced to work for the EIEC. They were paid little or no money and living conditions were deplorable (Assies 2005).
	1953 - Chilean Navy Rule.	Promoted Chileanization which discouraged the maintenance of Rapanui culture. Administration by the Chilean Navy proved harsher than the EIEC (McCall 2000).

As a result of the systematic dislocation of society and culture, in the late 19th century indigenous activist movements arose in response to government policies. Historically, the indigenous peoples of Australia, Aotearoa, and Rapa Nui were not a united people. In Australia, unity between Aboriginal nations was forged as a common front against colonial aggression (Robinson & York 1992).

Similarly, in Aotearoa, Kingitanga (the Maori King Movement) "was the first effort to create Maori nation, a new polity with which to confront the onslaught of colonisation" (Ballara 1996:1). Such movements would inspire a growth in Aboriginal and Maori activism well into the 20th century.

Rapanui activist movements gained momentum much later than indigenous peoples in Australia and Aotearoa, as the island was still under strict naval rule and its inhabitants without a voice. The 1960s produced a generation of Rapanui peoples who had gained an education on the mainland (Assies 2005). This enlarged Rapanui horizons as education became a tool which would expose the dire conditions on the island to the rest of the world (Assies 2005).

In recent years, the urgency for Rapanui peoples to unify themselves is still of great concern:

Come together, people of Rapanui! We are all Maohi people, let's not fight amongst ourselves! You who are not with us, I yearn for you ... night and day.
(Petero Edmunds, Mayor of Easter Island, cited on *Dateline*, 2004)

Comparative Table 3 shows only a few examples of achievements by indigenous people to attain social justice in the 20th century.

Despite these efforts, government will and motivation toward addressing indigenous disadvantage reflects the differences between current Aboriginal, Maori, and Rapanui socio-economic statuses and health conditions (Anderson 2007). Whilst there has been some recent progress in the recognition of the rights of Aboriginal peoples in Australia — such as the official apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008 — the New Zealand government has a record of being much more progressive in terms of responding to needs as well as respecting and recognising Maori peoples in the wider national identity (Anderson 2007). For example, Maori peoples today have fair representation in parliament whereas Aboriginal peoples are still poorly politically represented and remain invisible in the Australian national identity (O'Sullivan 2004;

Comparative Table 3. Indigenous Resistance and Policy Changes.

<i>location</i>	<i>event(s)</i>	<i>consequences</i>
Australia	1924 - Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA).	First united Aboriginal activist group to demand basic rights to citizenship, land, cultural identity, end to child removal policies (Broome 2001).
	1967 - Referendum.	Aboriginal activist groups such as FCAATSI demanded political recognition, basic citizenship rights for indigenous people; result was successful 1967 referendum overturning discriminatory parts of the Constitution (Broome 2001).
	1993 - Native Title Act.	The Act overturned the notion of “terra nullius”, set up a system through which native title claims could be considered.
	1997 - Bringing them Home Report (BTHR).	Report exposed impact that assimilation policies, child removal had on indigenous families and announced recommendations, including an official apology.
	2008 Apology.	Government apology made to people of “Stolen Generations” for atrocities committed by the government during period of child removal; came 11 years after the recommendation was proposed.
Aotearoa	1909 - Young Maori Party.	Formed by group of students from Te Aute College in response to the poor conditions in Maori health (Lange 1999).
	1975 - Treaty of Waitangi Act.	In response to Maori activism, Treaty of Waitangi Act established, creating Waitangi Tribunal to investigate treaty breaches since 1975 (Dow & Gardiner-Garden 1998).
	1997 - Tu Tangata Policy.	The Tu Tangata Policy emphasized Maori community, cultural development rather than assimilation (Dixon & Scheurell 1995).
	1987 - Maori Language Act.	Maori Language Act saw “Maori” adopted as official language of New Zealand.
	1995 - Apology.	Official apology made to Maori peoples by Queen of England for lands wrongfully seized by the Crown during 1860s Maori-Pakeha Wars.
Rapa Nui	1914 - Rapanui Revolt.	Rapanui activists revolted against poor working conditions, declaring independence; revolt quelled by the Chilean Navy. (Assies 2005).
	1966 - Civil Rights.	Due to pressure from new generation of Rapanui activists, Chilean government made Rapa Nui civil territory, its peoples equal before the law; ended forced enclosure in Hanga Roa, saw establishment of the Council of Elders (McCall 2000).
	1993 - Indigenous Law 19, 253.	Implementation of Indigenous Law established Commission for the Development of Easter Island where Rapa Nui would be guaranteed political representation (Assies 2005).
	2007 - Administrative status of Special Territory.	Chilean Constitution amended to establish Easter Island’s new political status as special territory, granting Rapanui peoples the right to self-determination, control over their affairs (Gonschor 2008).
	2007 - UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.	Chile ratified UN declaration, recognizing rights of Rapanui peoples and other indigenous peoples of Chile; Australia and New Zealand are not signatories.

Heiss 2007). In the past, the Chilean government “has historically denied its ethnic and cultural diversity” (Aylwin 1998:1). However, similarly to Australia, recent changes in Chilean government have seen a dramatic shift toward the future of its indigenous peoples. A more positive prediction of outcomes for indigenous people can be made in relation to the pivotal change of governance in Australia and Rapa Nui, reflecting those that have been demonstrated in Aotearoa.

It is widely recognised that “Indigenous people on the whole have been sicker and died younger than non-Indigenous inhabitants of the same colony or state” (Anderson 2007:144). Indigenous peoples in Australia, Aotearoa, and Rapa Nui experience lower levels of education, higher rates of unemployment, and substandard housing — all of which are social determinates of poor health status (ABS & AIHW 2005; Paradies, *et. al.* 2008). However, the health status of indigenous Australian and Rapa Nui peoples demonstrates a marked contrast to Maori in Aotearoa (Dow & Gardiner-Garden 1998). In order to effectively address this status it is important to consider the socio-economic indicators of each population separately.

In 2006, there were 517,200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, comprising approximately 2.5 percent of the total population (ABS 2006). Despite the growing indigenous population, the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is approximately 20 years lower than non-indigenous Australians — the shortest life expectancy of any First World indigenous population (Dow & Gardiner-Garden 1998; Oxfam 2007). There has been little or no development in the area of indigenous health over the past two to three decades, with the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous health increasing within this period (Alford 2005; ABS & AIHW 2005). This is a significant contrast with improvements in the area of Maori health in the last few decades (Ring & Brown 2002).

The 2006 census estimated that there were 565,329 Maori in Aotearoa — approximately 14.6 percent of the total population (Paradies, *et. al.* 2008; Stats NZ 2008). Like indigenous Australians, Maori experience socio-economic disadvantage in education, employment, housing, and health compared to the Pakeha population. However, disparities are not as disproportionate compared to Australia. The gap in Maori-Pakeha life expectancy is 7 years, demonstrating a stark contrast to the 20-year difference between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians (Oxfam 2007). Mortality rates for Maori have declined by almost 50 percent since the 1970s, whereas in Australia, there has been little or no change in life expectancy in this period (Dow & Gardiner-Garden 1998; Alford 2005). In providing one explanation, Alford argues that on “a comparative basis overall, and without denying the severity of health-related and health-system issues affecting indigenous populations in [both] countries, there seems to be greater marginalisation of Indigenous people in Australia” (Alford 2005:12).

Comprising 4.6 percent of the total population, indigenous peoples of Chile experience disadvantage in all aspects of socio-economic status (INE 2002; OPS-OMS, 2008). They are more likely to live in poverty and earn almost half the income

of non-indigenous families (Gacitúa-Marió 2000). In separating Rapanui peoples from other indigenous populations, all inhabitants of Rapa Nui make up 0.7 percent of Chile’s population (4,647 persons, of which 60% are Rapanui) and face disadvantages in education, employment, housing, and health (INE 2002). Both infant and overall mortality rates are significantly higher than the non-indigenous population (Grossi & Hernandez 1999). Accurate data relating specifically to the socio-economic status of Rapanui peoples is limited due to the amalgamation of data pertaining to Chile’s eight indigenous groups, making it difficult to determine life expectancy figures and to get a clear picture of the current socio-economic status. However, it can be argued that most statistics relating to indigenous peoples throughout the world are problematic as diversity is generally overlooked and experiences of socio-economic status and health conditions homogenized.

Nonetheless, research pertaining to socio-economic conditions of Rapanui peoples has generally been overshadowed by an anthropological and archaeological obsession with the past. Although such studies have been of great scientific importance, the current situation of Rapanui peoples is often overlooked (Weisner & Fajreldin 2005). The Merahi Rapa Nui Foundation argues that socio-economic status and poor health conditions of Rapanui peoples are simply a case of “out of sight, out of mind” (MRNF 2007). They suggest that geographical isolation from the economically prosperous mainland is also to blame — “The island suffers from lack of infrastructure and funding for health care, medical facilities, and education due to its distance from the mainland ... the world health organizations [*sic*] must have missed it” (MRNF 2007).

Legacies of colonization are reflected in the socio-economic conditions and poor health status experienced by indigenous peoples. Today, socio-economic inequality, oppression, and marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Australia, Aotearoa, and Rapa Nui are a direct result of the colonial past (Paradies, *et. al.* 2008). However, Australia’s indigenous peoples continue to experience some of the worst disadvantages in comparison to indigenous peoples in other countries. Although there have been positive changes pertaining to government relations with indigenous peoples, the lack of respect and recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced in the early days of invasion still resounds in the socio-economic status and poor health conditions of many Aboriginal people today. Ring and Brown (2002:630) ask “What is it about Australia that stops us from achieving the gains seen in the health of the indigenous populations in other Western democracies?” Sadly, indigenous health in Australia is met with a “deafening silence” (Ring & Brown 2002:630).

Generally, colonial governments that have made treaties with their indigenous peoples in the past tend to have a more positive health situation in relation to indigenous peoples today (Anderson 2007). Whilst discussions and debates continue regarding the understanding of treaties in Aotearoa and Rapa Nui, Aboriginal peoples in Australia fight for basic recognition by means of a treaty. Aboriginal academics Larissa Behrendt (2004) and Jackie Huggins (2008) highlight the

relation between socio-economic issues, human rights, and a treaty. As Behrendt states, "No-one would say that a treaty, in and of itself, would solve the broad range of socio-economic issues facing Indigenous communities today", however, "what is needed is the certainty of the recognition, protection and implementation of our basic human rights" (Behrendt 2004: 4,5). Furthermore, Huggins argues that a "Treaty to be on par ... with other Australians, to close the gap in all [socio-economic] areas is very fundamental to where we want to head" (Huggins 2008). Without a treaty, a significant closure of the socio-economic gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians will not be achieved (Havnen 2004).

Indigenous peoples of Australia, Aotearoa, and Rapa Nui share experiences of "a history of colonisation and dispossession, with consequent resistance and adaptation to invaders and settlers" (Anderson 2007:144). Early European perceptions of indigenous people influenced relations in all three societies, and informed government policies that have impacted on the lives of indigenous peoples to the present day. In response to such policies, indigenous activist movements called for a unified front against colonial aggression, mounting pressure on the respective colonial governments, resulting in many positive changes. Although sharing many similarities in their experiences of colonization, there remains one significant difference among indigenous peoples in Aotearoa, Rapa Nui, and Australia. Although mistranslated, the Treaty of Waitangi in Aotearoa and the Treaty and Proclamation in Rapa Nui at least recognized the indigenous peoples as sovereigns before European colonization. The lack of a treaty in Australia has continuously silenced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and forms the basis of the socio-economic disadvantage that indigenous peoples face today.

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